Boggs Says FBI Probed His, McCormack's Calls

By Ronald Kessler 4/20/71
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House Democratic Leader Hale Boggs claims that FBI agents last year obtained records of long-distance calls charged to his office telephones and those of former House Speaker John W. McCormack.

Sources close to Boggs also say that federal agents placed calls to several of those listed on Boggs' long-distance call bills to confirm that the calls had been made by Boggs.

The Louisiana Democrat has asked permission to address the House of Representatives for an hour Thursday but did not give further details.

Justice Department officials confirmed yesterday that toll records of Boggs and McCormack were obtained in connection with criminal investigations directed at former McCormack aide Martin Sweig and his associate Nathan M. Voloshen and at Baltimore contractor Victor J. Frenkil, who remodeled Boggs' Bethesda home.

They said obtaining such records is standard investigative procedure. The Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. said the records are given only if a subpoena is presented.

Sources close to Boggs insist the Louisiana congressman does not want to give the impression that senators and representatives should be immune from investigation of illegal acts. But he is understood to be upset that the records were obtained without his or McCormack's knowledge and that the act may have been an intrusion into the legislative branch.

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The FBI and the Justice Department declined to comment.

The sources say the phone records constitute Boggs' key concrete charge against the FBI. The charge does not support Boggs' original contention made April 5 in demanding the resignation of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that the FBI "taps the telephones of members of this body and of members of the Senate . . ."

Although the telephone company said the records are given only under subpoena, this reporter last week obtained from the telephone company information on long-distance calls charged to Boggs' House office by claiming to be calling for Boggs. Although the request was made with the permission of Boggs' office, the telephone company employee who disclosed the calls did not verify the identity of the caller.

The employee, upon request, also gave further details of individual calls listed.

For example, she reported that a call to a Princeton, N.J., number was placed person-to-person at 4:32 p.m. Feb. 5 to "Mrs. Sigmund."

The telephone, the employee said, is listed to Paul E. Sigmund. Mrs. Sigmund is one of Boggs' daughters.

Another number was listed only to Fort Polk, La., but the employee called the number to determine who might have been called by Boggs. There was no answer.

Federal law prohibits telephone company employees from disclosing long-distance customers' call records to others without a subpoena or except on demand of "lawful authority." Violation carries the same penalty as wiretapping by company employees.

A telephone company spokeman said yesterday that the practice of giving toll call records to persons who identify themselves as the proper customer relies upon the "integrity" of customers and "has never caused any difficulties."

"If there is any doubt as to

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the caller, our business office representative will arrange to call back. If this becomes a problem and we do have to change our procedures," the spokesman said, "this will not only be an inconvenience to our customers but very costly to the company and would ultimately be reflected in the cost of the service."

Congressmen and senators continued to attack and defend the FBI yesterday.

Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) charged that Hoover tried unsuccessfully to intimidate Trans World Airlines into firing TWA Capt. Donald J. Cook Jr., who criticized as "irresponsible and reckless" an FBI attempt to capture a hijack suspect at Kennedy Airport in New York in November, 1969 McGovern said the account was "substantiated by former agents of the FBI, and by Charles C. Tillinghast Jr., Chairman of the Board of TWA."

McGovern charged that President Nixon is afraid to remove Hoover as FBI director even though Hoover has become "irresponsible."

But Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C., who has been investigating government snooping, said he has yet to find any evidence of illegal actions by the FBI.

"I think he (Hoover) has done a very good job in a difficult post," the North Carolina Democrat said.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) said that until a member of Congress has evidence—"not just words"—of wrongdoing by the FBI, and the charge is investigated by the appropriate committee, "I am for the FBI . . . I expect (Hoover) to say in office."

Mansfield suggested Ervin's committee for such an investigation but said he wasn't asking Ervin to conduct such a probe.